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Portrayal of Three Generations Women in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

Abstract: Indian English literature comprises of many different forms of works written by different writers. The writers portray the culture of Indian society. Indian women writers deal with the themes of the sufferings of women. Women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Nair portrays women as a major character in their novel. They talk about the problems faced by women in the male dominated society. Among those writers Githa Hariharan takes an important role in Indian English Literature. Being a woman she is able to portray how women are treated in the Indian society. She uses lot of mythological stories from Ramayana and Mahabharata.

This article deals with the portrayal of three generations women in her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*.

Key Words : Women, sufferings, culture, generations, Indian.

Indian English literature is the works written by the writers in India. Their native language would be one of the languages of India. Now, Indian English literature has attained an independent status in the world literature. This literature deals with different themes and it reflects the culture, tradition, social values and even history of India. This happens by depicting the life of people in and around India. Many Indian writers have chosen English to express and represent the Indian culture.

From ancient days, Indians had the gift of storytelling. It is said that Indian English novel has its origin in the nineteenth century. Three early Indian writers made a mark in the genre of novel. They were Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Many writers emerged as novelists. They deal with the theme of Indians. Not only male writers emerged but also many women writers started to write novels. Many women writers took their part in Indian English novels because the novels provide them a way to discuss about the issues of women. Women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Manju Kapur, Anita Desai are prominent. They influenced the young women writers to work as a novelist. One among them was Githa Hariharan.

Githa Hariharan plays an important role in the Indian English Literature. She has written novels and short stories which deal with themes related to women. Among the other Indian women writers Githa Hariharan took a unique position in Indian English literature, Githa Hariharan's debut novel *the thousand faces of night* brings her fame and marks her place in literature. This article deals with the portrayal of three generations of women in her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*.

India is a land of myths. Many Indian women writers use myth in their works. Similarly Githa Hariharan also uses myth in her novel. In the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Githa Hariharan uses lots of mythological stories. The stories were taken from great Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharatha. This novel also deals with the conflict between tradition and modernity. Githa Hariharan portrays three women of three different generations. These women play the major role in the novel. The three important women characters in the novel are Devi, Sita and Mayamma. These three women are the representatives of three generations. Devi is the protagonist of the novel and represents the modern generation. Mayamma, the servant – maid stands for tradition. Sita, mother of Devi stands between tradition and modernity.

Devi as a representative of modern generation:

Devi is the central character of the novel and the whole novel revolves around her. When the novel opens, Devi returns from America. She was doing her studies in America. Devi's mother Sita wished to arrange for Devi to settle down in her life. So she decided to arrange a Swayamvara. Devi is not interested in marriage. But she accepts marriage, because she doesn't want to hurt her mother's feelings. So Devi gets ready for her Swaymvara. By that time, she remembers her grandmother's story about swaymvara of Damayanti.

Damayanti was a beautiful princess. She entered the hall where all the kings were seated on the thrones as bride – grooms. Damayanti walked slowly into the hall. While she was walking along the hall, the minstrels sang in praise of the kings. But Damayanti did not listen to that whole – heartedly. Her heart was towards Nala, the king of Nishadas. She chose Nala as her husband. Devi's grandmother's stories made her to think deeply.

By the time Devi remembered her grandmother's story, Devi met Mahesh and got married to him. He was a regional manager in an MNC. A new relationship was built between Mahesh and Devi. Devi was brought up without her father and Mahesh was brought up without

his mother. After marriage Devi settles in her in – laws house. She seemed to be happy with the company of her father – in – law, Baba and Mayamma, the house – maid.

Devi didn't get any chance to forget her grandmother's stories. At many situations, she remembers her grandmother's stories. In her husband's house, she was told stories by her father – in – law Baba. Her grandmother's stories were different from Baba's stories. Because, Baba's stories were all about tradition and grandmother's stories were to lead a modern life.

Devi's life with Mahesh was not happy. Mahesh was busy all the time with his job. He would go on tour by leaving Devi alone in her house. This would happen often and this made Devi unhappy. Once Devi tried to convince Mahesh to postpone his trip, because he had returned recently. But Mahesh gave a reply which no woman would approve. 'Why don't I pray to be born a woman in my next birth,' he teased. 'Then I won't have to make a living at all.' (TTFN p. 54)

Now, marriage hangs like a knife which hung before Devi's neck. Years pass on but there was no change in the relationship between Devi and Mahesh. Devi feels that the knife didn't kill her once but it made her to shed blood drop by drop. Whenever Devi feels unhappy she goes into the world of fantasy. Silence is the only companion for Devi in her house. By that time she was attracted by the music of Gopal who was her neighbour. This made her to elope with Gopal. But she found that Mahesh and Gopal were similar. Gopal also behaved like Mahesh. Being a modern woman she returned to her mother and she lived along with her mother.

Thus Githa Hariharan portrays Devi as a modern woman who decides her life by her own.

Mayamma as a traditional woman:

Mayamma is one another woman character in the novel. Mayamma represents the traditional culture. She is the maid in the house of Devi's husband Mahesh. Through Mayamma, Githa Hariharan says about how women are treated in olden days. Mayamma got married at the age of twelve to a man who was a gambler. Two years passed in her marriage life. But she was unable to give birth to a child. So Mayamma's mother – in – law accuses her:

What kind of girl is this, she said. She eats as much as anybody else, but is barren.

Her horoscope is a lie and so she will have to do penance to change its course. (TTFN p.80)

At the time of marriage, Mayamma's husband promised her that he would be a good friend of her. But he didn't speak even a word when his mother beat Mayamma. She started to torture and it became worse day by day. She gave Mayamma the previous day food. She said Mayamma that it was useless to eat fresh food for a barren woman. Similarly, Mayamma's mother – in law blamed her.

After ten years Mayamma gave birth to a son. Mayamma did not realize that her son would torture her. Eight years passed after the birth of Mayamma's son. Once, Mayamma's husband went away taking all the money from the home. Mayamma searched her husband but she was not able to find him. At the same time she found that her son was become cruel character. He threatens to beat her mother. Mayamma felt her loneliness. For her, the only companion is torture which was done by different persons at different situations.

Once Mayamma son hits her with frying pan. He did this because his mother didn't give him diamond ear rings. So, Mayamma's sufferings continued in her life. At every stage, Mayamma is alone in her life. Even her husband, mother – in – law and son didn't accompany her. When Mayamma settles in Parvatiamma's house, she left Mayamma alone and went away.

Being a traditional woman Mayamma accepts her fate. She cursed her fate but never questioned and lived as her expected life.

Sita as between Devi and Mayamma:

Sita, mother of Devi is yet another character mentioned in the novel. Sita plays an important role in the novel. The successful couple throughout the novel is Sita and her husband Mahadevan. Sita is a bold woman and she took decision at the correct time. Sita is not extremely modern as Devi and traditional as Mayamma. She is in between the two generations. As a modern woman she sent Devi to America for her higher studies. As a traditional woman she arranged marriage for Devi.

Once Devi heard a story about Gandhari from her grandmother. The story of Gandhari resembles the life of Sita. Gandhari plays a significant part in Mahabharatha. Gandhari was a beautiful princess and she was married to a rich king. His palace was “twice as big, twice as magnificent as her parent’s palace.” (TTFN p.28) Gandhari was very eager to see her husband. But her feelings were shattered on seeing him for the first time. Gandhari saw that her husband was blind and so she was shocked. In great anger and frustration she bound her eyes with the help of a veil. She sacrifices herself for her husband. This story was reflected in the life of Sita, Devi’s mother.

Before marriage, Sita was trained to play veena. She came to her husband’s house with her veena as her dowry. After finishing her household works, she would play veena. The household works were considered to be the important duty of the house – wife. One day Sita was playing veena. Her father – in – law called her for doing some work. But Sita couldn’t hear him. So, her father – in – law scolded her. “Put that veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter – in – law?” (TTFN p. 30) Sita got angry and frustrated. So she pulled out the strings of veena and promised that she would not play the veena in her life. She replied to her father – in – law by whispering, “Yes I am a wife, a daughter – in – law”.

Sita being a modern woman took her own decision that she would not play the veena. Being a traditional woman she did not come out of her family. Even after the death of

Mahadevan, Sita took the responsibility to lead the family. She satisfied all her responsibilities as a daughter, as a daughter – in – law, as a wife to Mahadevan, as a mother to Devi and as a mother – in – law to Mahesh. She is an example of a successful woman in the novel.

Thus Githa Hariharan through these three women characters portrays the life of three women who belong to three different generations in the Indian society.

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